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The United States Decision to Resist Aggression in Korea: The Application of an Analytical Scheme

The following article is part of a larger effort to learn more about the character of one vital decision, to study decision making as an action process, and to test the usefulness of a particular conceptual scheme. Foreign policy decision making is regarded as a special case of decision making in complex organizations, and its methods and findings are held to be capable of general application. Two kinds of decision-making-process analyses are differentiated: organizational and intellectual. Several tentative hypotheses are derived and the basic conditions for any decision are set down. The critical role of values in structuring the decision process is illustrated.¹

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¹The research study of which this article is a part will be published by the Ronald Press of New York in 1959. The present article is taken from Parts 2 and 3 of the four-part monograph.

THIS is a report on one phase of a research program directed toward building a more adequate theory for the description and explanation of international relations.² Until the controlled interplay of empirical investigation and theoretical formulations yield the components of a general theory, it is probably best to speak of "islands of theory" developed around significant problems or clusters of phenomena. Certainly a commonly accepted focus is the making of foreign policy by individual members of the international system. There are literally hundreds of statements about the "factors" and "processes" which result in actions taken by nation-states. However, in their present form at least, these statements do not provide a broad conceptual scheme capable of identifying and connecting a limited number of key variables which can be applied to any nation-state and to a wide range of situations. Generalized models for analyzing foreign policy making have been slow to develop.³ Case studies designed to throw light on processes and factors are few in number and have been prepared with diverse purposes, different kinds of data, varying degrees of descriptive adequacy, and largely implicit, heterogeneous conceptualization. The fact that the concept of "case" is itself subject to several interpretations is a further complication. For these reasons comparability of cases and its concomitant, generalizations which transcend cultural, institutional, and situational differences, are lacking. So far as the present writers know, there is no complete case study of a major foreign policy decision analyzed in terms of a generalized conceptual scheme. The research to be reported here should be viewed in this perspective.

PURPOSES OF THE RESEARCH

The commitment of United States military power to resist the invasion of South Korea by North Korean forces was, and is,

²The Graduate Program of Research and Training in International Relations, Department of Political Science, Northwestern University. This case study is one of a series to be undertaken and is closely related to organizational structure and process studies already begun in Washington.

³For an important effort in this direction, see Harold and Margaret Sprout, *Man-Milieu Hypotheses in the Context of International Politics* (Princeton, 1956), and "Ecological and Behavioral Models in the Analysis of State Capabilities—Considered with Special Reference to the British 'White' Paper on Defense, April 1957," a paper given at a symposium on the interrelations of behavioral and ecological models, Northwestern University, June 20–21, 1958.

regarded by former President Harry S. Truman as his most important decision. By almost any measure it was a major policy decision. To reconstruct the significant decision-making events that culminated in this history-making act is interesting and exciting. The dramatic story of what happened in the American government from Saturday night, June 24, 1950 (when officials were notified of the attack) to Friday noon, June 30, 1950 (by which time the full military commitment had been made) is the empirical core of this study. The chronological, descriptive reconstruction⁴ of decision-making activities during that week is presented objectively with as much richness of detail as the available data permit.

Our study has several purposes other than mere description of how this decision was made. In addition to learning about a particular policy at a particular moment, we wished to learn more about systematic analysis of foreign policy making. We have used the occasion to test the fruitfulness of a generalized conceptual scheme and to attempt to answer two basic questions: Why was there a decision at all in this situation? Why was this decision made in response to the North Korean attack instead of some other?

Although these questions are obvious, they are not trivial. The answer to the first question is not self-evident. Not only is there a persistently advanced hypothesis about decision inertia in bureaucratic structures, especially governmental, but there is also ample evidence that observers in Washington⁵ were predicting on Monday, June 26, 1950, that the United States would not undertake direct military intervention in Korea at the very time that such a decision was being taken. Reading what has been said about the decision since, one has the impression that the decision to intervene was inevitable. This was not the case. The second question goes to the heart of the problem of our eventual ability to predict, within limits, policy outcomes from a knowledge of processes. If exactly the same antecedent conditions will produce any one of several decisions, attempts at prediction are futile. But case studies of decisions made after the fact will contribute to the formulation of predictive hypotheses that can be tested in evolving situations.

⁴Whenever the term "reconstruction" is used, it refers to Glenn D. Paige, *The United States Decision to Resist Aggression in Korea—A Reconstruction of Decision-Making Events* (unpublished MS, 1956).

⁵For example, James Reston, *New York Times*, June 27, 1950, p. 5.

It is to be noted that neither question can be answered on the basis of description (i.e., what happened and how it happened) alone.

Normally, *ex post facto* reconstructions of policy making do not permit statements that might be judged adequate to account for the outcome of a decision-making process. Unless an observer brings in explanatory apparatus to his data, the facts, descriptive propositions, will not "speak for themselves" or suggest answers to certain "why" questions. Data must be collected, organized, and interpreted according to *a priori* operations. An observer not concerned with answering the two questions posed above will only accidentally provide the necessary empirical foundations for another observer to do so. No reasonably sophisticated social scientist would deny that *a priori* conceptualization "selects" data in some sense, nor would he deny that conceptual schemes often act as "blinders," permitting the observer to see only what he wants to see. But this fact has two sides. *If one's purpose is to account for a particular decision and if that purpose does not guide his reconstruction and inform his interpretation*, then the observer who concentrates only on the facts and rejects any explicit conceptual devices may omit pertinent data or obscure their significance.

Clearly, conceptual schemes are neither right nor wrong. They are more or less fruitful and must be judged in terms of whether they further the aims that the investigator has in mind. A scheme embodies certain assumptions about reality, and these assumptions may or may not be justified empirically. The kinds of data collected depend upon a guiding set of concepts; hence omission of available critical data indicates conceptual weakness. Hypothetical links among variables must be located or, preferably, spelled out in some detail. The ordering of data according to *a priori* categories should make possible the testing of both the existence and the content of hypothetical connections. Concepts must be minimally operational in the beginning or must be made so in the process of application to an empirical instance. The interpretation of findings should result in the most economical statement of the propositions that constitute an explanation of a given event. Needless to say, these rules impose serious responsibilities on an observer who is "testing" a conceptual approach.

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Only an outline is possible of the methodology of this study. Certain procedures in the reconstruction of a major policy decision would have to be followed by any investigator: analysis of documents, memoirs, hearings, and newspapers; interviews with key decision makers when possible; and use of supplementary questionnaires. Some special problems arising from this kind of study will be discussed below, but first the general features of the conceptual scheme will be set forth.

A Decision-making Approach

We have presented elsewhere a more detailed exposition of a framework for the analysis of foreign policy decision making.⁶ This framework is interdisciplinary, employing a combination of psychological and sociological variables. It regards foreign policy formation as a special case of decision making, in complex organizations generally, and is therefore capable of general application. To bridge the gap between organizational behavior theory and foreign policy formation, the following are postulated:

General Assumptions

1. Acts of a nation-state result from more or less deliberate and conscious choices by someone at some time, and a course of action is followed to serve certain purposes.
 - a) The focus is on the behavior of official decision makers whose acts are authoritative so far as external relations are concerned.
 - b) There is no assumption of any particular forms of rationality; the assumption of purposeful behavior excludes only purely random responses having no value base.
 - c) Unconscious motivation is not excluded, but it is assumed that actions are structured by calculation of some sort at the time choices are made.

⁶See Richard C. Snyder, H. W. Bruck, and Burton Sapin, *Decision-Making as an Approach to the Study of International Politics* (Foreign Policy Analysis Series no. 3; Princeton, N.J., 1954) and R. C. Snyder, "Decision-Making as an Approach to the Analysis of Political Phenomena," in Roland Young, ed., *Approaches to the Study of Politics* (Evanston, Ill., 1958), pp. 3-38.

2. Official decision makers do not behave as discrete individuals but as participants or role players in an organizational system.
3. Nation-state action is determined by the way in which a situation is defined subjectively by those charged with the responsibility for making choices.
 - a) In effect, this implies a frame of reference with the "state as a collective actor in a situation" as the core concept.

Specific Assumptions

1. Four sets of factors determine the behavior of official foreign policy makers; organizational-individual factors; internal setting factors; external setting factors; situational factors. To put it another way, foreign policy makers take into account these four sets of factors in reaching decisions.
 - a) Organizational-individual factors—The total relevant institutional environment; the reservoir of persons, roles, rules, agencies, and functions from which a particular decisional unit is formed and within which it operates. The total official foreign policy organization is differentiated from organizational subsystems geared to certain tasks or handling specific problems.
 - b) Internal setting—Broadly the society and culture; resources, technology, groups, elites, public opinion, mass media; the political climate; cultural values; social wants and needs.
 - c) External setting—The international system; friends, allies, neutrals, enemies; international organization; diplomatic rules; bilateral and multilateral relationships; relevant internal factors in other nations; policies of other states.
 - d) Situational properties—The particular event or problem to be dealt with; an occasion for decision plus its "core context" consisting of perceived variables abstracted from the total internal, external, and organizational setting.
2. The four sets of factors are interrelated. Relevant subfactors in each category must be identified, confirmed, weighted, and related by the decision makers.
3. Perceived relevant subfactors will vary from situation to situation but some aspect or aspects of each general category are

assumed to be determinants in every situation. Weightings of subfactors will differ from situation to situation.

These four interrelated categories may be regarded as the “variables” employed by the decision makers. From the makers’ viewpoint these are crude indicators of the determinants of their action. From the observer’s viewpoint, however, a related but different set of variables (to be discussed below) is required to describe and explain how decision makers handle their variables.

Concepts and Analytic Variables

Rather than discuss all the concepts and variables included in the general framework for decision-making analysis which we have developed, we shall mention only those central to the purposes at hand, and we shall postulate certain definitions without analyzing them in any detail:

1. *Decision making* is a sequence of activities which results in the selection of one course of action from a set of socially defined alternative courses of action intended to bring about the particular future state of affairs envisaged by the decision makers.

2. *The decision-making process* consists of (1) deliberation and calculation, specification and clarification of values, interpretations of information concerning objective events, identification and weighting of relevancies, establishment of alternatives, evaluation of probable outcomes, choice of one alternative—all leading to a “definition of the situation”; (2) a chronological flow of decision-making activities and organizational path—which decision makers acted and with what consequences—through which the intellectual process outlined in (1) is expressed.

3. *The decisional unit* is comprised of those actors responsible for making a decision in a particular situation or those actors whose decision-making activities result in a choice of a course of action—identified by the observer on the basis of the decision-making event being investigated and of the specific organizational system activated by a particular problem or situation.

4. *The organizational system* is a set of relatively fixed roles and relationships—and the activities flowing from them—characterized by repetitive, predictable behaviors, the roles and activities being bounded by a particular decision-making event.

Decision making is thus a sequence of activities resulting in choice. Process is given two meanings: the deliberative process with respect to a particular decision abstracted from the total activities engaged in by decision makers, and the organizational process—who does what, when, where, and with what consequences. Clearly there are several important aspects of decision making aside from deliberation, and deliberation itself has multiple aspects.⁷ And there are other meanings of process.⁸ Since this study is primarily concerned with what might be called intellectual process analysis and with the chronological flow of major decision-making activities, these two particular concepts of process are stressed.

Three Major Variables

Let us assume that the decision makers have been identified and that the organizational unit has been determined. What kind of data on the decision makers and their activities is to be collected? Three variables, or rather sets of variables, provide guidance: organizational roles and relations, communication and information and motivation. Our basic assumption is that if a sufficient number of factual propositions on the behaviors and activities implied by these variables can be established, the interrelations of the three sets of propositions become the empirical foundation for an explanation of a decision. A necessary step toward this is to convert the straightforward historical reconstruction of decision-making activities into a descriptive analysis, i.e., a description of what happened in terms of the major variables. In other words, wherever there is complex organizational decision making, these three sets of conditions must exist and will be related in their impact on decision making. Furthermore, the most economical method of isolating the key empirical propositions is to categorize the data according to which of these three variables is predominantly involved. The three categories of analytic variables generate a series of questions which both select and organize the data. A

⁷At a very general level: (1) decision-making organism, (2) decisional environment, (3) occasion for decision, (4) deliberation, (5) decision, (6) outcome, (7) path of action and feedback. Though unexplicated here, these analytic components offer a basis for specifying the range of phenomena implied by the term "decision making."

⁸I.e., (1) deliberative process, (2) sequential process—chronological event flow and organizational history, (3) interaction process, (4) choice-mechanism process, (5) influence process. These are, of course, interrelated and all five "processes" operate in the over-all decision-making process in actual situations.

detailed exposition of these variables has been presented elsewhere.⁹

In the analysis¹⁰ of the reconstruction of decision-making events, we have identified some 42 basic specific propositions (organizational variable = 7; informational variable = 20; and motivational variable = 15) and interspersed them with an analytic description of decision-making activities. Since only 42 have been drawn from a long, detailed account, it is apparent that each represents an abstraction from many descriptive statements. A sample is presented below so that the reader may have some idea of the analytic technique:

Organization

Specific proposition no. 2: The number of organizational agencies and roles which were incorporated in the decision-making process was relatively small.

Specific proposition no. 5: The President's leadership was the key factor in defining and stabilizing the authority structure.

Specific proposition no. 7: The organizational custom of presenting unanimous recommendations to the President tended to limit the area of disagreement.

Information

Specific proposition no. 1: Limited information did not prevent an initial definition of the situation which included elements beyond the objective situation *per se*.

Specific proposition no. 2: Limited information did not prevent a decision to keep the invasion from succeeding.

Specific proposition no. 9: The decision makers were not subject to competing or conflicting information that seriously affected their deliberations.

Motivation

Specific proposition no. 1: Initial evaluation of the seriousness of the event resulted in the imputation of a high degree of requiredness to the situation.

⁹See Snyder, Bruck, and Sapin, *op. cit.*, and Snyder, *op. cit.*, for a more detailed exposition.

¹⁰All future references to specific propositions and general hypotheses are to Richard C. Snyder, *An Analysis of Case Materials on the U.S. Decision to Resist Aggression in Korea* (Palo Alto, 1957).

. Specific proposition no. 3: There was a will to act among the decision makers, and there were means at hand to make a positive response possible.

Specific proposition no. 12: Differences among the decision makers with respect to relative orderings of values and situational relevancies did not prevent, or alter in any basic way, the sequential definitions of the situation because such differences did not have to be reconciled and were completely overshadowed by the cruciality of shared orientations.

From these three categories we have developed a master list of basic questions to be asked in any organizational decision, in addition to the specific questions which we asked the Korean decision makers in interviews, reinterviews, and written follow-up questionnaires. All other evidence in the case has been searched with questions pertaining to organization, information, and motivation in mind.

In sum, we have postulated that organizational decision making consists of a sequence of activities carried on by members of a unit whose behavior is determined by *structural factors* (role differentiation, authority relations, a set of rules, and a communications network—both internal and external to the unit), by *certain kinds of information* possessed by individual members or provided by the structure, and by *individual shared motivational factors* (values, attitudes, cognition, and perception). The psychological and sociological levels are joined, and there are implied interrelations among the three sets of variables. Illustrations of the latter point follow: (1) organizational roles partially determine who will decide and hence whose values, attitudes, and perceptions will be crucial; (2) values, attitudes, and perceptions will partially determine the selection and interpretation of information; (3) the organizational structure will partially determine the communications network.

To revert to the decision makers' variables—the factors in the overlapping settings and concrete situation which must be reckoned with—we feel that the questions we ask will yield data which will reveal these factors and that the hypothetical links among the observer's variables will point to the interrelations of the decision makers' variables and to the consequences of this for a decision

taken. Our information variable, for example, cues us to all the factual elements that bear on a decision and to the way various information elements are selected and calculated. Factual elements may be additive, unrelatable, or self-canceling so far as the decision makers are concerned. Above all, it is the impact of information on other components which is significant, and there is no method of analyzing this except by relating organizational and motivational factors to information.

SOME METHODOLOGICAL PROBLEMS

It will occur to the reader that reconstruction of a major policy decision is difficult enough without attempting to apply a complex conceptual scheme. Certain difficulties have already been suggested. We shall discuss only a limited number of problems here, and only in the context of the Korean study. As we proceed we shall try to suggest various lessons we have learned.

Adequacy of Data

One of the perils of writing recent history is that pertinent materials are usually not available to scholars until long after the event. We were very fortunate in that a reputable journalist had had access to Presidential papers and had interviewed participants not too long after the period of decision. We ourselves received full co-operation from the key decision makers, who were not only willing to be reinterviewed but to read and comment on our draft reconstruction of the week's activities. The absence of serious disagreements or jurisdictional disputes, plus the conviction of the decision makers that the decision was the correct one, undoubtedly enhanced the willingness of respondents to talk freely. While we were not allowed to examine highly classified documents, the Historical Research Division of the State Department did examine these documents in order to answer our questions. We were also provided with an official chronology. Memoirs, notably the former President's two-volume work, have since been published. Supplementary appropriation hearings and the hearings held on the removal of General MacArthur offered a wealth of data. Everything considered, we feel we have more than sufficient data for our purposes. So far as we can tell—and we are reassured by the deci-

sion-makers themselves—we have neither significantly distorted the record nor omitted any data that might alter our reconstruction or analysis in important respects. Of course, only a later study based on direct access to classified materials will confirm this.

On the other hand, data which would permit a blow-by-blow account and analysis of face-to-face and non-face-to-face interactions among the decision makers are lacking. This is, then, a round-by-round account, not an interaction-process analysis. The complete network of communications cannot be reconstructed, though the data to describe information sources and flows are available. With a day-by-day reconstruction which is fairly rich in detail but not a complete organizational history, we are limited to an “intellectual process” plus a partial “organizational process” type of decision-making case study. However, the data are adequate for analysis of the organizational variable and its effect on decision making. Although we can assess personality factors, we cannot reconstruct interpersonal relations during the decision period and we have not attempted to investigate fully the knowledge, skills, and theories of the decision makers or their social backgrounds. These data limitations do not mean, however, that we are unable to answer the two basic questions posed earlier.

Memory

No one denies that human memory is fallible and selective. This is a fact scholars must live with. Several strategies, available in most public policy cases, have been employed to deal with this problem. In the first place, the submission of a draft reconstruction of a decision-making event to the participants may be a more effective way of recalling facts than the interview or questionnaire, for the reason that occurrences are put in correct order, thus outlining a chronological skeleton of significant developments, and that occurrences are placed in a richer context, thus providing a larger sample of possible associations. Second, there is an official record—a chronology, as well as other documents—to which limited access was possible, thus providing a check. Third, we found newspaper accounts of the time exceedingly valuable—more valuable than we had previously thought and on the whole highly accurate in the light of later evidence. Evidence from a number of newspapers

must, of course, be pooled and evaluated in the light of other evidence, but our experience has led us to believe that such evidence is extremely useful.¹¹ Fourth, some of the most pertinent data are based on the direct testimony in official hearings of those involved in the decision within a relatively short time after the week of June 24–30, 1950—notably the summer of 1950 and the spring of 1951. Fifth, several of our key respondents kept diaries which they consulted in response to our questions. One of the most important decision makers, Ambassador Philip C. Jessup, actually kept “minutes” of the crucial Sunday night, June 25, meeting of the decision-making group. Sixth, close questioning of all the important decision makers gave us a list of “memory” checks which could be followed up in reinterviews and questionnaires as well as some idea of those whose memory might be trusted on specific points.

Fortunately, on major points we had no head-on inconsistencies to resolve. An extremely important condition in our favor was the absence of any really significant disagreements which might add a very selective dimension to individual memories. Furthermore, it is a well-known hypothesis in psychology that when there is marked satisfaction with a past decision or with past conduct, the scope and accuracy of memory is facilitated. There is partial confirmation of this hypothesis in the present case. To this day all the decision makers feel this was a right decision.

Rationalization *ex post facto* is a familiar phenomenon in historical reconstruction, especially when memoirs or interviews are employed. It may take two forms: first, reinterpretation of what happened; and, second, reinterpretation of why it happened. The problem posed by the former is essentially no different from verification of any occurrence. The second form is more ambiguous, although it too has a factual component. Suppose the reasons for a decision given at the time, whether revealed publicly or not, are different from the reasons given years later? If the two sets of

¹¹Our findings on this point have been in harmony with and have tended to substantiate further the earlier conclusion of Alexander L. George that “a surprising amount of reliable information about American policy calculations can be obtained from the columns of the better metropolitan dailies.” See his “American Policy-Making and the North Korean Aggression,” *World Politics*, 7 (Jan. 1955), 210.

reasons can be separated, it is our contention that the original ones are pertinent to the reconstruction and the analysis, but that later reasons, though interesting, are irrelevant. If data on the original reasons are lacking, that is a different problem. When later memory must be relied upon for evidence of original reasons, special care must be exercised in reconstructing them. Again, one aid is inter-subjective comparison. The observer is foolish who inquires whether the original reasons given were in fact the "real" ones. To repeat, the reasons for a decision given by the participants are not sufficient to explain why a particular decision was made. Provided evidence of the relevant values and other data are available, the decision can be accounted for, regardless of reasons advanced by the decision makers.

Suppose, for example, that the "real" yet unexpressed reason for the strong, positive response to the North Korean invasion was the prevailing domestic political climate, one component of which was the oft-repeated charge that the administration was "soft" on communism and that officials had "sold out" in China. This involves guessing on the part of the observer—inferences drawn by him from his interpretation of the political climate and his interpretation of how decision makers must or should behave under such conditions. It also involves a string of untestable assumptions. On the other hand, analysis of verified facts justifies an explanation of decision-making behavior based on a descriptive portrait of the way things looked to the participants. Both, of course, are consistent with the outcome. The explanation to be preferred is the one which rests on sound empirical foundations.

Problems of Application of a Conceptual Scheme

Quite apart from problems of data adequacy and memory and from an evaluation of a conceptual scheme in terms of criteria of logic, there are difficulties of application to a particular set of events. Beginning with highly generalized definitions, assumptions, and variables, there are a whole series of logical extensions and operational procedures required to bring a scheme "closer" to the data for purposes of collection and organization. When the data have been assembled and categorized, the task of interpretation requires further adjustive operations moving from data

back to the conceptual scheme. For example, our exposition of the organization variable (or, indeed, of the other two major variables) did not, in its first crude presentation, set forth a *leadership function*. If the scheme had been logically extended a priori, this subconcept should have been specified. Since we became involved in researching the decision before refinements in the scheme had been formally accomplished, the process of data interpretation suggested, ex post facto, what some of the refinements ought to be. Working backward in this fashion has the advantage that additional specifications are directly implied by concrete findings and not by hypothetical thinking *in vacuo* or by impressions from scattered and incomplete data. It has disadvantages arising from the limitations of the single case and from imprisonment at a lower level of generality. To return to the leadership function, the following general properties emerge:

1. Ultimately the leadership function (or, really, a set of functions) is implied by, and/or flows from the exercise of role prerogatives and level of authority.
 - 1a. There are several kinds of leadership functions having direct effect upon organizational, informational, and motivational variables.
 - 1b. Leadership, at the most general level, appears to be not only an independent variable, but a dependent variable determined by organizational structure (group properties and interaction), personality characteristics, and situational components.

To illustrate the latter point, we shall outline the leadership functions performed by former President Truman and former Secretary of State Acheson as they appear from our data, viewing each set of functions as both dependent and independent variables.

1. *President Truman's leadership*

- a) As a dependent variable. His leadership was a function of role prescriptions and his interpretation of these prescriptions, of the nature of the decision-making group, and of the situation:
 - 1) The President had to decide; no one else could validate the decision.

- 2) The President had to co-ordinate jurisdictions and views when necessary.
 - 3) The President had to structure his authority relations.
 - 4) The “crisis” nature of the situation and the “range of response possibilities” meant that the President’s unique responsibilities and power would be involved.
 - 5) The decision-making group consisted of delegated operating roles and staff roles—advisers and implementers of policy choices.
- b) As an independent variable. President Truman’s leadership was relevant for:
- 1) The choice of participants in decision-making groups—particularly the *ad hoc* Blair House conferences of Sunday night (June 25) and Monday night (June 26)—trusted as well as technically necessary because of the problem at hand.
 - 2) The role structure of his advisers (i.e., the whole decision-making group except the President) in terms of (a) genuine solicitation of ideas and (b) requests for individual approval or disapproval or recommendations.
 - 3) The specification of relevant values—notably preservation and strengthening of the United Nations.
 - 4) The validation of, and acceptance of full responsibility for, a momentous course of action.
 - 5) The assignment of roles within the decision-making group, notably the designation of Secretary of State Acheson as the drafter of recommended actions.
 - 6) The provision of an “historical context” for the objective situation to be dealt with—a sense of historical perspective.
 - 7) The determination of choice-making procedure—Quaker-meeting consensus plus individual oral responses to proposed actions.
 - 8) The creation of a pervasive atmosphere of “resolve” and “determination.”
2. *Secretary of State Acheson’s Leadership*
- a) As a dependent variable. His leadership was a function of:

- 1) His prescribed role as Secretary of State—both internal to the Department of State and vis-à-vis other agencies (i.e., “first among equals”).
- 2) Specific assignment by the President to draft key recommendations.
- b) As an independent variable. His leadership was relevant for:
 - 1) The drafting of recommendations for military intervention discussed at the June 26 Blair House conference.
 - 2) The assumption of initiative for the formulation of the initial responses to the news of the North Korean invasion when it was received Saturday, June 24.
 - 3) The specification of relevant values, notably the whole collective security system built up since World War II.

Obviously the foregoing does not indicate the whole leadership function manifest during the week, but it does point up crucial aspects which helped shape the decision and the decision-making process. It is worthy of note that we have here illustration and limited confirmation of the validity of Bales's familiar distinction between “charismatic” and “idea” leadership or leadership roles.¹² Truman inspired his advisers and created an interpersonal relationship between himself and them, and among them, which helped to structure both process and outcome. Acheson provided central proposals—ideas upon which discussion centered.

Of the different strategies which might be chosen by a leader to structure group decision making, the President chose to ask for recommendations, which were then reacted to by the group, rather than to present his own proposals for discussion or to hold back his own proposals until the group had reached its consensus first. As already mentioned, the decision makers were unanimously satisfied with the group choice, though we are unable to make any statements about the significance of the mode of leadership for the satisfaction felt.

Another problem of application resulted from the earlier formulation of the motivational variable. When we began our study of the Korean decision, we had a general definition of motivation and

¹²See, for example, Robert F. Bales, *Interaction Process Analysis* (Cambridge, Mass., 1950).

some notions as to the kinds of data which would provide a basis for motivational statements. In addition, we had postulated the concept of "definition of the situation of action"—a familiar and explicitly or implicitly accepted notion. This concept was not, however, operational as formulated because there were no clear guide lines for coding data in terms of it. Nor, surprisingly, did the literature contain such operational rules. One of our tasks was to make the concept of definition of the situation into a useful tool for organizing and interpreting data in this case. By working back and forth between the concept and the data, we arrived at the following five component elements of the definition of the situation: (1) categorization of an event in terms of past experience and existing "givens"; (2) specification and clarification of generalized values and the bearing of the objective situation on them; (3) perceived relevancies—factual aspects "added to" the objective situation; (4) establishment of a set of goals—a desired state of affairs to be attained; and (5) assessment and selection of one combination of available means and desired goals.

This formulation has several advantages. First, it is relatively easy to code data once it is collected. Second, it can be applied to a group even though motivation is essentially an individual concept. That is, points of consensus and disagreement can be established if the data permit so that statements can be made reflecting the group definition of the situation. Third, it clarifies the empirical components of the "intellectual process" of decision. Fourth, it suggests a multiplicity of elements which are and must be inter-related; no one or two elements are sufficient to account for the way a particular situation is defined. Neither values nor objective events are sufficient. An obvious example is that available means will often determine what goals can be pursued.

One ever-present problem is the possibility that a conceptual scheme will imprison the observer, allowing him to see only what the scheme directs him to see and ruling out other interpretations of data. It is readily admitted that this danger is implicit in all a priori thinking. Ordinarily it is the historian who issues this warning. To be noted first is the fact that Eric Goldman in his excellent account of the Korean decision omitted the important fact that the United States decision makers overestimated the

resistance capacity of the R.O.K. army and underestimated the military strength of the North Korean forces.¹³ This is precisely the kind of data our scheme would highlight. In all fairness to Goldman it ought to be said that he devotes only a single chapter to the whole episode and that his purposes probably did not include an attempt to answer the “why” questions we posed for ourselves. At any rate, the point is that selectivity is not peculiar to applied theory constructed in advance of an investigation. However, to guard against any inherent bias of selectivity in our analytic apparatus, we have also engaged in normal “historical sleuthing.” That is, we have used an empirical event as our focus and have worked outward from this, following whatever leads were uncovered. Beginning with the time of the actual invasion by North Korean forces (Saturday, June 24, 3 P.M., EDT) and ending with the President’s announcement of the commitment of “certain supporting ground units” Friday noon, June 30, we have attempted to include all relevant actors and data—in short, any facts which had to do with the invasion and the response to it during a specified time period. Thus we have combined application of a conceptual framework with historical reconstruction in the manner of a good historian or reporter. Furthermore, we have consciously played one against the other. Conventional history yields an explanatory “what” and social science theorizing can produce a rigorous “why” explanation.

To summarize, we have four interlocking devices to guide our data collections: (1) what was said and done by those associated with a clearly defined week-long event; (2) a set of questions generated by our conceptual scheme; (3) factual chains which develop as the answer to one question leads to still other questions; and (4) an unstructured interview technique which is designed to let the participants recount what they felt was important. The “blinder effect” of item no. 2 was counterbalanced by the other items as safeguards.

Parsimony

Economy in the collection of data and in explanatory mechanisms is a canon of scientific analysis. A comprehensive scheme may

¹³*The Crucial Decade: America 1945–55* (New York, 1956).

lead to unnecessary operations and to overanalysis. As noted above, parsimony results from constant testing and refinement. If one must err, it ought initially to be on the side of overelaboration of categories which can be eliminated after empirical investigation demonstrates the need to do so. The allegation that a conceptual scheme requires "too much knowledge" on the part of the observer has one tentative reply: Too much for what or in what sense? If it is a matter of not having access to data, we are back to an issue already discussed. If it is a matter of the purposes of the analyst, the question is whether the purposes must be changed or whether another scheme will achieve the same end more efficiently. The latter is something to be determined by experimentation.

We hope we have achieved some parsimony without sacrificing adequacy of explanation or without making too many untested assumptions. In the Korean case we have formulated 17 specific empirical propositions linking the three variables which, tentatively, we feel account for what was done and why. Now it must be emphasized that this is not the equivalent of saying 17 factors (variables) entered into the decision. For one thing the propositions link pairs of variables. For another, the same variable may, and does, appear in more than one proposition. Moreover, when we consider the specific empirical propositions abstracted from the reconstruction under each variable there are only 42 altogether. This stands in contrast to the hundreds of lower-order descriptive statements that comprise the reconstruction.

We hope also that we have developed means for cutting through the excess detail, the long narrative, to identify the "core" of the decision—the basic alternatives and calculations abstracted from descriptive statements and given explanatory interpretations. Naturally this does not include everything said about the event, nor does it "explain" the explanation in terms of factors unstated in the core analysis. Again, parsimony is related to purpose.

The Problem of the Single Case

This is a persistent source of difficulty for the social scientist: breadth versus depth, generalization versus the bases (number of instances) on which generalization rests. In comparison with many so-called case studies, we have a study in depth; our work is closer

to the scope of T. M. French's *Integration of Behavior* (two volumes on a single personality) than to the studies used by the Harvard Business School. Clearly, however, we do not have the degree of depth manifest in French's work. It is commonly asserted that the greater the depth, the more restricted the individual case becomes; i.e., it is less comparable to other cases. Leaving aside different conceptions of what a "case" is, the single case does raise the problem of comparability as well as that of generalization. Comparability requires an n -number of things to compare and a set of generalized aspects or categories which attribute common properties to the n -number of objects or which derive from them. Generalization rests on comparability.

We are well aware of the limitations of the single case. Nevertheless, depth study of a single event or sequence of events is a distinct advantage to the observer who wishes to perfect a scheme of analysis. No one can learn what data can be "thrown away" until he has some idea of what the sum total of data is like. On the other hand, it is agreed that the analytic aspects of an object cannot be exhausted, and empirically it is also improbable that we can be exhaustive. But the greater the depth of analysis, the more one can learn.

There are some means for overcoming single-case limitations. First, an effort can be made to formulate hypotheses from the data in a specific case which have more general applicability and which can be tested in other (though different cases). To this end, we have derived some forty general hypotheses which we shall test in succeeding studies. Second, the outstanding empirical characteristics of the Korean decision presented below suggest the need for typologies, among them types of decisions, types of decision-making roles, types of decisional units, types of objectives, and types of situations. Preliminary work along these lines has already been done.

A sample of general hypotheses follows. Needless to say, we make no claim at this stage as to their empirical or logical status; they appear interesting and fruitful to us at the moment. No attempt will be made to specify the conditions under which the hypotheses will hold true.

Hypothesis 11: The greater the urgency and the shorter the decision time, the fewer are the number of significantly differentiated alternatives.

Hypothesis 15: If authoritative sources of information are, in effect, reduced to one, the greater is the influence of that source on the definition of the situation.

Hypothesis 16: The shorter the decision period, the less thorough is a search for information within the communication system likely to be.

Hypothesis 17: Initial responses to serious but ambiguous situations are more likely to be positive when a response is available which does not foreclose subsequent alternatives.

Hypothesis 23: It is possible to infer from a decision the relation between degrees of preference for possible outcomes and degrees of belief in the probability of possible outcomes.

Hypothesis 29: The stronger the value components (i.e., motive strength) activated by a situation, the less likely is insufficient information to prevent a decision.

Hypothesis 35: Overt value decisions will be made only at the highest level of an organizational hierarchy.

Hypothesis 40: When crucial choices are forced on an organization from the environment, the decisional subsystem will be characterized by smaller decisional units and a simpler role structure.

We expect also to derive general hypotheses from the 17 empirical propositions which link the three variables. For example, from specific proposition no. 1 under information and motivation an interesting hypothesis is: the higher the decision makers are in the organizational hierarchy, the more likely are they to be their own source of information with respect to "perceived relevancies" which are "added to" the objective situation.

The Problem of Objectifying the Reconstruction of Decision-making Events

In order to reconstruct the week of decision making from the subjective standpoint of the policy makers and to report only verified factual events, it is extremely important to prevent the intrusion of the observer's judgments and speculations. Clearly

this is not an easy task, and complete objectivity is perhaps not possible. One habit that can be acquired with sinister ease is the connection of simultaneous events which are not so connected in the minds of decision makers but which are logically connected, or ought to have been connected, according to the observer. To facilitate decontamination of the reconstruction we have deliberately separated the reconstruction from the analysis. There is a similar observer-actor dilemma with respect to the presentation of the background of the decision, but we shall forgo comment on that here. In addition to separating the account of decision-making events and the analysis of those events, we have formulated a set of rules for deciding on the inclusion of statements in the former.

By separating events into predecisional (prior to 3 P.M., EDT, Saturday, June 24, 1950), decisional (3 P.M., Saturday, June 24 to 12 noon, Friday, June 30, 1950), and postdecisional (after 12 noon, June 30, 1950) periods, it is possible to preserve not only the proper chronology but to isolate those events central to our purposes. We do not attempt to report or account for events not in the decisional period. Events of the decisional period are confined to statements of things done and said by those in one way or another involved in the Korean situation and in the decision-making activities—the decision makers, their advisers, newspapers, other governments, the military, and so on. Such statements may be confined to a single fact: e.g., Truman read the usual four newspapers he always read on Monday morning, June 26. Or a statement may reveal what the President was thinking about the problem that morning. Or a statement may summarize what the editorials said at that time. Finally, a statement may include both the President's thought and the editorial content and still be a factual statement. But it is not a statement of fact to infer any causal link between the two facts unless actually warranted by the evidence. Hence in the absence of further evidence a statement: "The President was undoubtedly influenced by what he read in the editorials" is not fact but speculation.

There are three kinds of connecting statements which ought to be distinguished:

1. Chronological linkage. On Saturday it was decided to proceed

in a certain way through the UN and on Sunday an emergency meeting of the UN Security Council was requested.

2. Causal linkage (when verified). The President was not influenced by what he read in the newspapers Monday morning though he was interested to see what was being said; or the United States decided to proceed through the UN because "it was a positive course of action which would not commit the U. S. prematurely to a given course of action."
3. Linkage of simultaneous events. On Sunday, when the decision makers were discussing what should be done, the North Korean forces were advancing rapidly. (This was not known in detail at the time.)

Statements of a causal variety (2) are excluded from the reconstruction and confined to the analysis. Nevertheless, explanatory statements made by the decision makers concerning their behavior at the time are included in the former. To ensure further that unwarranted interpretations, queries, and judgmental statements are kept in their proper place, we have divided both the observer's interpretations and subjective views of the decision makers prevailing at the time into predecisional, decisional, and post decisional categories. We have also been explicit about the time when evidence is established in order to insulate hindsight from a description of the state of affairs during the period of decision making. For example:

| <i>Predecisional period</i> (Prior to June 24) | <i>Decisional period</i> (June 24-June 30) | <i>Postdecisional period</i> (After June 30) | <i>Analysis</i> (Ex post facto) |
|--|--|---|---|
| I. Actual absolute and relative military strength of North and South Korean forces | II. Actual estimates of decision makers; what they thought and/or knew at the time | III. How relation between I and II turned out | IV A. Descriptive: Discrepancy between I and II |
| A. Known accurately to somebody at the time | A. Statements made during the decisional period | A. Decision makers and observer ex post facto | B. Explanatory: Effect of II on the decision |
| B. Later established by (1) decision makers and (2) observer | period about the pre-decisional period | B. Statements made by decision makers and others (pertaining to the actual state of affairs during I and during II) | |
| <i>Background</i> (includes A when verified; includes also III B) | II <i>Reconstruction</i> (includes III B) | III A) | <i>Analysis</i> (includes III A) |

Implications are queries not necessarily answered by descriptive reconstruction or analysis when these are confined to actors' behavior. Why the discrepancy between I and II? (This can be answered factually but it has nothing to do with question IV B). Why were the South Koreans not better armed? (This too can be answered factually but has nothing to do with the answer to question IV B) The kinds of questions raised under the heading of implications are interesting and pertinent, but neither the questions nor the ex post facto judgmental or factual answers made to them by the observer belong in the background, the reconstruction, or the analysis (which is confined to attempts to explain the behavior of decision makers). It is perfectly true that if the estimates of II had been different, the course of decision making would have been different, and hence statements under IV would be different. It is one thing to say that the decision makers acted as they did because they underestimated the strength of the North Koreans forces; from the point of view of interpreting how the situation looked to the decision makers, this is hindsight. It is another thing to say that the decision makers acted as they did because they estimated the strength of the North Koreans in a certain way; this is an accurate portrayal of the existing state of affairs from the decision makers' perspective. Statements of this sort belong only in the analysis, but it is significant to note that the latter does not require hindsight. Theoretically, the latter statement could be made without accurate knowledge of conditions under I. The judgmental statement depends on such knowledge. The former inference can be drawn solely from evidence of the prevailing state of affairs under II; the latter cannot. Both are justified if the evidence is complete enough to sustain both. The "why" questions posed above require additional evidence and arise out of the reconstruction of the decision but are not part of it.

Our concern with the foregoing distinctions arises from the fact that in many reconstructions confusion between the observer's and actors' perspectives and between factual statements and interpretive or judgmental statements abound. It is proper for the observer to make statements in the reconstruction which juxtapose two facts or events—even where the decision makers were not aware of simultaneous occurrences so long as no causal imputation

is implied or made explicit. It is not proper for the observer to add to the reconstruction such statements as: The decision makers underestimated the strength of the North Korean forces. This is a fact, but it is, so to speak, a postdecisional fact. The observer can, however, present evidence of the actual relative strengths on the eve of the decision (the background) so long as in recounting the events of the decision period he includes only statements made by the decision makers or statements which faithfully reflect their momentary calculations regardless of the objective situation in Korea. Perhaps the whole point here is that explanation and what is being explained must be kept separate. They must be separated because explanations bound up with a narrative are often passed off as facts when in reality they are hypothetical links between facts which rest on grounds other than the truth or falsity of the facts being linked.

MAJOR EMPIRICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE KOREAN DECISION

It will be useful to provide a bird's eye view of this decision through a series of characterizations directly suggested by the data.

1. This was a major or crucial decision in view of the cost in money and lives, and of the impact on existing plans and policies.

2. The decision time was unusually short for a major decision, and the degree of urgency was high—i.e., it was a crisis decision.

3. The necessity for decision was thrust upon the decision makers by a change in the environment and not spontaneously induced from within the total foreign-policy-making organization.

4. The occasion for decision was one of surprise.

5. This was a positive action decision, not a policy decision (in the sense of establishing rules for meeting future contingencies).

6. This was an unprogrammed decision. There was no plan for dealing with the exigency which arose.

7. Only a small number of clearly identifiable decision makers were involved—at the most 14, and even fewer if the core group of 8 or 9 who were members of the key decisional units throughout the week are counted.

8. It was a high-level decision in that all the effective decision

makers were of the rank of assistant secretary or higher, if civilian; or were service chiefs, if military.

9. The Korean decision had a short, relatively simple organizational history.

10. Taken as a whole, the decision was irrevocable in the sense that once the chosen course of action was embarked upon, there was little room for "adaptive interpretation," which might have made goals less ambitious and means less costly.

11. The decision did not represent goal setting in a structured environment but rather an adaptive response to a new situation.

12. The decision was an integrated decision not a compromised decision: the action taken served several compatible values and did not require the partial satisfaction of two or more incompatible values.

These characteristics not only throw some light on the nature of the Korean decision, but taken together they constitute a description of its unique features. How often would these characteristics be repeated? How can one generalize on this basis? We have already mentioned the need for typologies and for deriving general hypotheses from the single case which can be tested in subsequent cases. The reader will note that the twelve characteristics imply typical dimensions: the nature of the occasion for decision, cruciality, lack of a pre-existing plan (unprogrammed), duration of the decision period, location in the organizational hierarchy, the distinction between policy as action and policy as rules, and so on. Most of the characteristics mentioned would be dimensions of decision, decisional unit, and situation types. To render the Korean decision comparable, the crude empirical characteristics must be located in a classification scheme applicable to a wide range of decisions.

In our analysis of the case we have derived general hypotheses from the foregoing statements, for example:

Characteristic 4: General hypothesis. Surprise creates initial vacuum in the deliberative process in which the evaluation of the significance of an event precedes the full unfolding of the event.

Characteristic 2: General hypothesis. The shorter the decision time, the fewer the alternatives which will be considered, and the

less extensive an estimate of multiple outcomes attached to particular courses of action.

Characteristic 12: General hypothesis. Situations defined as having a very high degree of threat and as indicating direct action, tend to result in integrated decisions.

These hypotheses, and others set forth above, need explication and, in some sense, justification. In short, they are not completely self-explanatory and they need a context. We have attempted to do so elsewhere. Here we shall simply repeat that the testing of hypotheses of this sort ought to advance our knowledge of what kinds of determining factors are associated with what kinds of decisional outcomes.

The Structure of the Korean Decision

From our analysis it would appear that an outstanding characteristic of the Korean decision is its sequential nature. From Saturday night, June 24 (the occasion for decision) to Friday, June 30, a series of choice points occurred. The Korean decision is really a set of decisions which were not made at one point in time. One way to view the structure of the decision is as a series of related but analytically separable sequences: (1) a sequence of choices at successive stages; (2) a sequence of decisional units; (3) a sequential flow of information; and (4) a sequence of definitions of the situation. All four fall naturally into eight stages. There are nine separate decisions and nine decisional units.

A brief indication of what was decided and when can be embodied in an outline as follows:

Stage I, Saturday: Decision 1. (a) To respond positively and (b) to respond in a particular way through the UN (request an emergency meeting of the Security Council and present a resolution stating that an act of aggression had taken place).

Stage II, Sunday: Decision 2. (a) Not to permit the invasion to succeed; (b) to evacuate American citizens from South Korea; (c) to send additional arms and ammunition to the South Koreans; (d) to move the 7th Fleet northward from the Philippines.

Stage III, Monday: Decision 3. (a) To commit American naval and air units in direct combat support of the ROK army south of the 38th parallel; (b) to guarantee the neutrality of Formosa by

interposition of the 7th Fleet; (c) to increase military aid to the Philippines; (d) to accelerate military aid to French Indochina; and (e) not to use ground forces in direct combat at this time.

Stage IV, Tuesday: Decision 4. To send a note to the Soviet Union asking that the Soviet government disavow responsibility for the attack and use its influence to have North Korean forces withdrawn.

Stage IV (cont.): Decision 5. To introduce a second UN resolution calling upon all members to give military aid to South Korea.

Stage V, Wednesday: Decision 6. To extend American air and naval action north of the 38th parallel.

Stage VI, Thursday: Decision 7. (a) To restrict use of ground troops to protection of supply lines and evacuation of citizens; (b) to restrict American air and naval action to purely military targets north of the 38th parallel; (c) to order air and naval units to stay clear of Soviet and Chinese borders.

Stage VII, Friday (early morning): Decision 8. To permit General MacArthur to use one regimental combat team in resisting the invader.

Stage VIII, Friday (late morning): Decision 9. To authorize General MacArthur to use all troops under his command at his discretion.

Several points should be noted. This outline represents an abstraction from many, many activities. It is a deliberate simplification for the purpose of laying bare the logical and chronological highlights. However, these stages do not reveal and cannot reveal when the individual decision makers made up their minds. What is revealed is the time when group opinion coalesced and was made official and the content of the decisions. Nor can we say that all the decision makers actually experienced the decision-making process as a series of clearly marked stages, although some did. However, the data shows that some decisions were made before others, that some stand in an implementary relationship to others, and that some were more significant than others. As can be readily seen, one developmental trend was the progressive enlargement of the American military commitment.

The nine decisions above (from occasion to full commitment

of the armed forces) can be viewed as a single event with the time sequence collapsed. For some purposes this is the most appropriate view. Empirically, decision 3 seems to be the core choice because it determined the fundamental character of the response to the situation. Nonetheless, it is also strongly suggested by the data that decision 2 was a necessary prerequisite to direct military action. Finally, it is equally appropriate to say that the Korean decision did not emerge completely until ground troops were committed because this made involvement considerably more "warlike." Now if decision 2 was logically prior to decision 3 (as well as chronologically prior), decision 3 cannot be regarded as the only choice which would have been consistent with decision 2. And though decision 9 would hardly have been likely without decision 3, the former is not fully determined by the latter.

These statements represent different but equally useful perspectives on the decision. Argument over when the decision was really made or which statement identifies the real decision is fruitless without the qualifications noted and unnecessary if these qualifications are accepted.

Sequence of Definitions of the Situation

Space does not permit us to reproduce our analysis of the evolution of definitions of the situation and the emergent goal structure associated with various stages and decisional units. Rather we shall present first an overview of major general elements in the definition of the situation shared by the decision makers and which prevailed throughout stages II–VIII. These elements were as follows: (1) requiredness, the necessity and urgency to act directly and positively; (2) political challenge (presented by an event characterized as an act of aggression), short-run prestige and "blackmail," with long-run threat of another world war, which could not be ignored; (3) belief in the likelihood of "limited conflict," odds good, cost unknown; (4) calculated risk of all-out war if the U.S. intervened; (5) assumed probability that China and the Soviet Union would not directly intervene if the U.S. did so; (6) overestimation of South Korean strength and underestimation of North Korean strength.

At stage I the definition of the situation included the element of requiredness, but the choices were also made in terms of its being

“natural” to proceed through the UN, the need to buy time without foreclosing other alternatives, and the mobilization of collective support for future action. At stage II the consequences of a successful North Korean invasion were found to be intolerable and certain “routine” measures were taken; yet not enough was known about the objective situation to justify consideration of specific courses of action. At stage III it was felt that the commitment of American naval and air units would be sufficient to throw the invader behind the 38th parallel and that the conflict could be kept limited. At stages IV, V, and VI steps are taken to enhance UN support, to gain assurances from the Soviet Union, to define the American intervention as a “police action,” and to avoid direct involvement of ground troops while assigning them to rear area duties. At the same time during these stages the situation was partially redefined to extend military action beyond the 38th parallel. At stages VII and VIII the situation was partially redefined again, which led to commitment of ground forces.

The general elements persist from stages I and II and function as “givens” at succeeding choice points. However, the evolution of definitions of the situation reveals a progressive increase in the degree of requiredness, a progressive decrease in the range of alternatives, and a progressive extension of the military commitment coupled with efforts to keep the conflict limited, all accompanied by perceived changes in the objective situation.

The Sequential Flow of Information

Motivational evolution in the Korean decision cannot be understood apart from the nature, amount, and interpretation of information at each stage and at the time of each decision. One of the most significant aspects of the case is that the main features of the objective situation in Korea did not unfold all at once. The sequence of revelation about the progress of the fighting begins with a limited report Saturday night and ends more fully revealed early the following Friday morning. The limited information at stage I becomes the basis for a decision which was positive and preparatory for next steps, yet which would not reduce flexibility of choice at the next stage. On the other hand, this condition did not prevent an initial categorization of the event as an act of

aggression. Information on the worsening situation in Korea (stages VI and VII) paves the way for an extension of the military commitment later in the week.

Not much new information was available during stage II; nevertheless a consensus was reached that the invasion could not be allowed to go unchallenged. At stage III estimates of the capacity of the R.O.K. army to thwart the invaders, an overestimation, were crucial in the choice of American air and naval units as sufficient to turn the tide. During stages II, III, and IV the decision makers received evidence of congressional support; of United Nations reactions favorable to American intervention; and some confirmation (or at least no invalidation) of their assumption that the Soviet Union would probably not directly engage American forces. Notification at stage VI that only the commitment of ground troops would stop the northern onslaught shattered a previous element in the definition of the situation, namely, belief that American air and sea support would suffice. Thus subsequent information on important aspects of the internal and external setting tended to confirm or not to confirm elements in the earlier definitions of the situation.

A distinction between information about the objective situation in Korea and "personal" information brought by the decision makers to the problem or supplied to them by intelligence estimates and reports is vital. This partially explains how the decision makers could categorize the North Korean attack in terms of past experience despite the paucity and fragmentary nature of the information that was available during the first two days of battle. For them, the violation of a frontier by organized military forces was clearly another example of the aggressions of the 1930's. To them, also, the "lesson of history" was unmistakable: unchecked aggression eventually leads to world war. The immediate evaluation of the role of the Soviet Union in the affair was also made possible by knowledge not gained from reports on happenings in Korea itself.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS IN THIS CASE

We began by talking about two kinds of decision-making process analysis: organizational and intellectual. The two are related

because the former (1) determines whose calculations and discussions will be authoritative and (2) provides ingredients for the intellectual process through intelligence and other functions. Intellectual process results in the definition of the situation.

Organizational Process

For reasons previously noted, the organizational process in this case is relatively uncomplicated and manifests some important features. The first decisional unit (Saturday)—Ambassador Philip C. Jessup; Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, Dean Rusk; Assistant Secretary for United Nations Affairs, John Hickerson; Deputy Undersecretary H. Freeman Matthews; and Secretary of the Army Frank Pace—was largely accidental in the sense that the President, the Secretary of State, and Counselor George Kennan were all absent from Washington. On the other hand, the five officials who constituted the unit had organizational roles which rendered them eligible for handling the situation on Saturday night. Naturally their recommendations had to be accepted by Secretary Acheson and validated by President Truman. The decisional unit for Sunday and Monday was larger and included the President, Secretary Acheson, Secretary Johnson, the chairman and individual members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the civilian secretaries of the armed services.

In addition to the accidental nature of the first unit, it is important to observe that the major decisions throughout the week were made by *ad hoc* decisional units and not permanent units. Thus the National Security Council does not loom large in the process regardless of the fact that it might be considered a natural agency. Nor was a permanent group in the State Department involved. Relationships among decision makers during the week were mostly informal, and communication was predominantly oral and face to face. This suggests that a multidimensional crisis decision which requires top-level authority necessitates the formation of a key group which can escape organizational formality and normal procedures. The pressure of the situation results in the “invention” of a special decisional unit. As shown above, the decision makers acted with remarkable speed.

This relatively informal, high-level organizational process minimized the problem of co-ordination among roles and agencies. No

involved processes of clearance and compromise were necessary. President Truman's leadership, viewed as an independent organizational variable, determined the membership of decisional units (except the first one) and the allocation of power and responsibility within the decision-making group.

The Intellectual Process

In general, and abstracting from a multitude of behaviors, the deliberations of the men who decided the American response to the Korean crisis appear to confirm a basic model derived from our conceptual scheme. Given identified, authoritative decision makers, an organizational system, and a communication network (internal and external), decision-making consists in the combining of values + attitudes + information + perception + situation into the choice of a course of action. Another formulation is: a decision results from the interrelating of values and situation with attitudes, perception, and information serving a two-way mediating function. In this process values are clarified; the question of what values are threatened by an event or events is raised and answered. Value relevancy is established by a "reading" of the situation and by calculation of the consequences for particular values of a certain state of affairs. The protection of values depends upon the specification of a concrete objective and a strategy for achieving the objective.

An observer cannot predict decision-making behavior on the basis of knowledge of the actor's values alone. Values have to be operationalized in terms of the situation confronting the actor, which means that objective properties of the situation (information) and the relevancies surrounding it (perception) must be determined. Generalized values such as national security must be converted into more specific objectives, which, when achieved, will constitute a state of affairs deemed to express or serve these values. The determination of concrete objectives, of course, includes some calculation of multiple probable outcomes of single courses of action. No matter how strongly a value is held, it seems highly unlikely that a course of action having no probable outcome which would serve that value will be chosen. In the assessment and weighting of outcomes, we have a combination of a

factual and a value judgment and it is this combination which makes prediction based on the basis of value alone impossible.

However this may be, the Korean decision is pre-eminently a value decision. The strength of the value component—really a set of five basic general values¹⁴—overrode uncertainties. To a certain extent all public policy decisions involve risk or uncertainty, i.e., outcomes are more or less probable. Such a high degree of decisiveness was attributed to the situation that a course of action was chosen which implied a risk of all-out war and incalculable costs. In effect, the decision makers felt that the values to be served by intervening militarily outweighed any potential costs. It was, to put it another way, a blank-check decision.

Two very important qualifications must be noted. First, the attribution of a high degree of decisiveness is a necessary precondition for a decision in which the value component overrides cost. That is, the categorization of the objective event (actual situation in Korea plus its classification as a member of a class of similar events) preceded the specification of relevant values and the value-cost relationship. Second, the calculation of outcomes included a factual judgment concerning the chances of all-out war; i.e., they were improbable.

Another characteristic of the intellectual process embodied in the decision bears on our earlier distinction between value complementarity and value compromise. The former we defined as the key element in an integrated decision. Although the shared elements in the definition of the situation included agreement on the basic general values involved, there were different assessments of the relative importance of these among the decision makers. These different assessments did not alter the definition of the situation, however, because (a) the values were not incompatible and (b) the values actually were mutually reinforcing because of recognized links between them, e.g., the United Nations was at once an end or goal value and an instrumental value vis-à-vis the post-war collective security system.

¹⁴I.e., (1) avoidance of World War III; (2) preservation of the UN as a viable international organization; (3) maintenance of the collective security system which had been built up since 1945; (4) protection of American prestige and leadership and the confidence of friends and allies; and (5) enhancement of American military security in the Far East.

Models of the analysis of decision making usually postulate choice among two or more alternatives, and the intellectual process is viewed, in part, as the construction of a set of alternatives, which are then examined in terms of value implications and outcomes. In our analysis we have taken an observer's liberty to specify a set of alternative goal and instrumental values at each of the eight stages of the decision-making process. We have done so as a means of locating the alternative course of action chosen by the decision makers and of logically extending the implications of "if this course of action, then not that course of action." Recognizing frankly that this is an analytic fabrication on the part of the observer, we have attempted a *verstehen* type of operation guided by what a "reasonable" decision maker might see as alternatives and by asking the decision makers if such and such alternatives might have been considered regardless of whether they were.

Empirically, however, the decision-making process in the Korean case was not characterized by the consideration of multiple alternatives at each stage.¹⁵ Rather a single proposed course of action emerged from the definition of the situation and then was subject to critical scrutiny—not in comparison with other alternatives (except inferentially) but in the context of values, outcomes, costs, and so on. For example, at stage III no alternatives to Secretary Acheson's set of proposals (among which was military intervention) at the Monday night Blair House meeting were offered or discussed. Perhaps the hypothesis would be: when the decision-making process must be compressed into a short time period and the situation is a crisis thrust upon the decision makers from outside, single alternatives rather than multiple alternatives will be considered. If this holds true, it suggests a different dialectic from that which is usually assumed. The hypothesis also is consistent with hypothesis II listed above. One possible consequence of the single alternative process may be to put a great premium on leadership and on the adequacy of probability calculations. Another may be to provide a way of simplifying a situation to the point where action is possible, thus avoiding the complexities of estimate

¹⁵See William Reitzel, Morton A. Kaplan, and Constance G. Coblenz, *United States Foreign Policy 1945–1955* (Washington, 1956), pp. 259–280, for a different analysis of the alternatives in the Korean situation.

involved in discussing multiple alternatives. Of course, the single alternative phenomenon may simply reflect the constricting effects of "givens" which rule out many otherwise pertinent choices.

CONCLUSIONS: WHY A DECISION AND WHY THIS PARTICULAR DECISION?

In conclusion let us indicate the bases on which we might tentatively answer the two questions posed at the outset:

Why a decision at all?

1. Decision makers authorized to act, motivated to act, and prepared to act were present.

Why this positive response rather than some other?

1. Direct military intervention, having the specific objective of restoring the *status quo*, was commensurate with the basic values threatened.
2. The objective could probably be achieved by a limited military commitment and without incurring total war or total national mobilization.
3. The risks and costs of this course of action were acceptable in terms of the values at stake; the consequences of the loss of South Korea were intolerable.
4. The means (air, sea, and ground units) were immediately available to implement the course of action decided upon.

Answers to the first question suggest the necessary and sufficient conditions for any decision. It is not sufficient to have a group of decision makers willing to act; one can imagine a lack of information which would preclude anything but a blind response. Nor are motivation and information sufficient; those authorized to act must be both willing and prepared. Even these conditions, though necessary, are not sufficient; in addition, the situation must be defined as requiring action.

These conditions may be regarded as necessary and sufficient for any action, but they do not predict what action. The second set of answers also implies a set of conditions. Really this amounts to saying that if the particular course of action were not deemed sufficient to achieve the objective without consequences which would subvert the basic values being served, another course would

have been chosen. The probability calculations with respect to the limited commitment of military forces and the chances of world war, plus the ready availability of military power (not being otherwise used), were crucial. Regardless of the cruciality of the values threatened, another course of action might have been chosen if assessments of these factors had been different. We have established to our satisfaction that the decision makers did not feel they lacked discretion despite the seriousness of the situation. Within this range of discretion, the formulation of the particular strategy adopted depended on the determinants identified and analyzed throughout this paper.